



thrust

SCIENCE FICTION

VOL. 2

25¢

NO. 1

Editor's Note:

Because of an unfortunate error, pages
15, 14 and 13 must be read in reverse order.
Our sincerest apologies.

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CONTENTS:

Cover by Roy Comiskey.....	1
Editorial Page.....	2
Interview with Keith Laumer.....	3
Metamorphosis by Keya Kullar.....	6
"Warp" article by Doug Fratz.....	9
Man the Animal - Strip by Roy Comiskey.....	11
Past the Half-Prime in Gumboll by Don Smith.....	13
Book Reviews.....	17
The Void - Poem by Steven L. Goldstein.....	19
Potent Comments - Letter Column.....	20
Backcover by Roy Comiskey.....	22

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STAFF:

Editor-in-Chief: D. Douglas Fratz
 Managing Editor: Steven L. Goldstein
 Layout Assistant: Felipe Alfonso
 Typists: Chris Lampton, Natalie Paymer
 Writers: Keya Kullar, Don Smith, Mike Bartholomew
 Artists: Roy Comiskey, Vaughn Bode, Rich Adams, Steve Hull, Larry Kamp, Dave Cockrun, Al Hanley
 Photographer: Rick Eskite
 Publicity Editor: William E. Fink

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the third issue of Thrust Science Fiction. We are quite proud of our new format this year, and hope that we will continue to improve both in content and format.

The beautiful covers this issue are by Roy Comiskey, of Silver Spring. Roy also did a strip this issue and will be back next issue with more artwork.

Keya Kullar, author of this issue's "Metamorphosis" is from India. She shows great talent in her use of the language, and we hope to see more of her work in future issues.

I saw "Warp," the SF play, and I knew I had to spread the word via a full feature article. It is truly an excellent production.

Don Smith is back with possibly his strangest and best story yet, "Past the Half-Prime in Gumboll." It's a truly singular piece of SF.

That's all for now. Watch for next issue, due out late November.



-Doug
Fratz

INTERVIEW WITH



KEITH LAUMER

Interviewers: Steven L. Goldstein, Ron Bounds,
Felipe Alfonso, William E. Fink,
Greg Davis

Transcribed by Steven L. Goldstein.

STEPHEN L. GOLDSTEIN: Can you give us any advice for the aspiring writer?

LAUMER: Start reading as soon as you're out of the cradle. Read everything you can get your hands on, from the Encyclopedia Britannica to Edgar Rice Burroughs. You do that until the language becomes second nature and you no longer have to stop and decide how to put together a sentence - "Let's see, I've got to have a subject. What will the subject be? And then I need a predicate. What do I put in there?" You get to where it becomes automatic to express yourself in words. And then you start writing and you just write like a mad son-of-a-bitch all the time and that's the way you become a successful writer. Of course, you have to be a natural born genius to begin with. So, it's really quite simple.

GOLDSTEIN: I guess that leaves me out.

RON BOUNDS: But then there's Ed Earl Repp, and other early science fiction writers, who - it can be demonstrably proven by looking at their stories - were not geniuses. At least they did not express themselves as geniuses.

LAUMER: Of course I'm only telling you how to be a really great writer. I'm not telling you how to be a mediocre writer. I wouldn't know anything about that. All I know about is the best.

FELIPE ALFONSO: Mr. Laumer, do you think that reading is important to your writing?

LAUMER: Of course.

ALFONSO: Is it possible for you to be a good writer although you have not read much?

LAUMER: No. You can't be a good writer if you haven't read a lot - no matter what you feel; anymore then you can be a great painter without knowing how to pick up a brush. Reading and writing are far more important than experiencing or reacting. If I were going to train a writer I wouldn't send him around the world on a Chinese junk. I'd send him to a local library.

BOUNDS: How about the use of experience in writing?

LAUMER: Well, that's the grist for the mill. Once you know how to write, then you can use your experiences. But you have to have the language automatically at hand without difficulty or hesitation.

BOUNDS: I'm trying to think of writers who did not read voraciously when they were children or adolescents - and I can't.

LAUMER: I know a lot of writers and I don't know one who did not read voraciously when he was young. But I'm only speaking from my own experience. I'm not passing on lore I got out of a book, which I totally discredit. I'm telling you what I know from my own experience.

ALFONSO: Is this true for mainstream writers as well?

LAUMER: Sure. For writers in general.

GOLDSTEIN: Is your character Retief based on any real life persons you may have met on your diplomatic tour?

LAUMER: Yes. Mainly myself. In most every character a writer delineates there are aspects of himself, because everything that character says or does comes out of the mind of that writer. The reactions and ideas of Retief are my own. I agree with him 100%.

BOUNDS: Would you describe Retief as an opportunist?

LAUMER: No. A realist. An opportunist has no philosophy of life. He just wanders along grabbing whatever happens to go by - whereas a realist understands the parameters of the world and he doesn't espouse lost causes or base his actions on beautiful, rosy theories that have no relation to what actually happens.

BOUNDS: But he also grabs opportunities when they present themselves.

LAUMER: Yes. He makes use of whatever aspects of reality are impinging on him.

GOLDSTEIN: Getting back to writing, how do you go about writing a novel?

LAUMER: I make it up as I go along. I only write outlines when I'm signing a contract in advance - which I usually do. Usually the publisher wants to see an outline, but sometimes I just write a one page summary to give him a rough idea of what it's about. But then, since I invariably ignore the outline, it didn't really have to be written. In actual practice I just make it up as I go along, which makes it a lot more interesting. I'm eager to get back to the typewriter each day to find out what happens next.

GOLDSTEIN: That's sort of the way A. E. Van Vogt says he writes his novels - by stopping every 800 words and deciding where to go next.

BOUNDS: I find it difficult to believe that he does it that way. His most famous book is of such a "wheels-within-wheels" nature that - unless his mind is phenomenal - he...

LAUMER: Probably his mind is phenomenal. Or was. Van Vogt's older writings were among my favorites. I have sometimes been accused of writing some convoluted plots. Worlds of the Imperium, for example. Someone once told me, "Oh, I knew Bayard was the villain from the beginning." And I said that I sure wished they'd been there at the beginning, because I had no idea. Not the least. Sometimes when I'm three quarters of the way through and I have to figure out who the villain is I'm able to go back and re-read the first part and I can pick up some pointers that look as though they had been planned. I think my subconscious is doing things my conscious is unaware of.

GOLDSTEIN: That must be how you wrote Dinosaur Beach.

LAUMER: That was based on a novelette in Galaxy [Editor's Note: In Anal] called "The Timesweepers." The basic elements of the plot were all in "The Timesweepers." If somebody wanted to be a real prick, they could say that it had all been said in "The Timesweepers" and there was no reason to re-write it. But there are several excellent reasons for writing a novel. As I went along I didn't know what was going to happen next - not in terms of what was going to happen right away. I knew it in broad general terms only. And I remember distinctly how I happened to write the original story. I had been writing novels and I felt that it was time to write a shorter piece, so I went outside - I live on a small island in a lake - and went down to the shore and just walked up and down trying to make my mind a blank so that inspiration could come and finally I came up with this picture of a guy sitting in a beer joint and a stranger sits down across from him and says, "Would you mind if I sat here?" I said, "That's good! I'll start with that!" All the rest just came as I wrote.

BILL FINK: Do you ever find yourself going off on a tangent that may lead you to a dead end you can't get out of?

LAUMER: If I start on a tangent that's leading to a dead end, I nip it off before I get started on it. I try to keep things tied together so that it will all work out. I have an instinct as to how far I can wander from the main theme without being unable to pull it back together. I have a feeling for the shape of the book as a whole and I work within that shape.

GOLDSTEIN: Are there any writers who have influenced your style?

LAUMER: To some extent I've been influenced by everything I've ever read and I think that's

true of all writers. I would say that Raymond Chandler, the mystery writer who created Philip Marlowe back in the 'thirties, has influenced me more than any other single writer, because I admire his work so much - the economical way he wrote and the way he kept his stories moving at all times. You never reach the point where you yawn and say, "Yeah. What happens next?", and just start turning the pages. The whole feeling of Chandler's stuff pleased me - and suited me - and I've tried to capture that kind of feeling in my own stuff. I didn't want to wander off into pages of dull description, which Chandler never used, and to that extent he has influenced my writing. In fact I wrote a mystery in '69, just before I was sick, in which I deliberately wrote a pastiche of Chandler's writing. It was his "next book," the one he would have written if he hadn't died. It is written in as exact an imitation of his style as I could manage, without duplicating any plot incident or character or directly quoting his language. It's an original creation, in the style in which he would have written it. It's called Deadfall, a mystery.

GOLDSTEIN: Do you have any thoughts on mainstream writers like Caidin and Barth who are beginning to write science fiction and fantasy as if they had discovered a new field for the first time?

LAUMER: I said many years ago that science fiction would engulf the mainstream. Science fiction is the larger category of which the so-called mainstream is merely a subdivision - a very limited one. More and more writers are coming to realize that you don't have to go to Omaha and memorize all the street names in order to write a novel. They can set it anywhere they want - in Marsport, for example - and name the streets themselves, without those arbitrary restrictions. Writers are beginning to realize this just as painters did back in the 1880's. They realized that they did not have to render every leaf on a tree. They could go quooosh with some yellow or green and then they were impressionists, which was a whole new thing that was much better than what they had been doing before. It gave them freedom.

BOUNDS: Getting back to Deadfall, you've only done one mystery so far - at least that's been printed. Is there any reason for this?

LAUMER: Well, I just wrote it a short time ago and I've been working on other things since, that's all. I might do another. My character's name is Joe Shaw, which has a meaning to the initiate. Shaw was the editor of Black Mask Magazine, where many of Chandler's stories appeared back in the 'thirties. The knowledgeable reader who picks up the book will see the name Joe Shaw and make that connection in his mind. So I may write another Joe Shaw mystery one day. I've just sold the first one to the movies, so if it does well and they make a good movie out of it, it might inspire me to do another, because then I'll be able to tell the publisher that this is hot stuff and they need the book desperately and to get their hands out of their pockets and pay up. I've always felt that writers should eat well. There's no reason for the guy who sets the type to make more money than the guy who wrote the book - which they do. There's no reason for the guy who wrote the movie contract to make more money than the guy who wrote the book that the contract is about. That's ridiculous! So I'm fighting it - a one man war - by getting the biggest advances and royalties that I can for what I write. When I write I'm an artist. When I deal with publishers I'm a business man.

BOUNDS: How do you reconcile the two?

LAUMER: The interface between the two is sim-

ply having a nice, pleasant, comfortable life, without any hangups like, "Gee whiz, these thousand dollar bills are so crass!" I like those coarse notes myself. I don't find any conflict the typewriter and I don't, come on like a pansy interior decorator when I'm talking to a publisher. I say, "YOU SON OF A BITCH, YOU'RE GOD-DAMNED LUCKY TO HAVE THIS MANUSCRIPT." Come on! Get it up! Double it! Pay! It's reasonable, that's all. Once I write the book, why should I get less for it than I can?

GOLDSTEIN: Any reason why you haven't tried your hand at writing fantasy?

LAUMER: No. I just write my books as they come to me. I didn't stop to think whether they were science fiction or fantasy. I just wrote what I wanted to write. I've recently read a lot of the Ballantine books Lin Carter has been editing and I think he's doing a very good job. He's interested me in fantasy more than I was interested before. Reading those books has inspired me to think about writing pure fantasy. My Lafayette O'Leary epics are pretty near fantasy - but they're rationalized fantasy. I could write a fantasy and enjoy it, so I probably will some day.

GOLDSTEIN: You've done two novel length collaborations in the past. How did you go about writing those?

LAUMER: I used a somewhat different method for those two. Some writers - I think it was Pratt and deCamp - once said jokingly that they decided to divide up the parts of speech and that one handled all the nouns and the other all the verbs. Or something like that. In my case, the first collaboration just grew. I was in England at the time, with the Air Force, and I got a call from an American female who told me that Damon Knight had told her that I was in England and had given her my phone number. She said her name was Rosel George Brown and I thought real hard and F&SF came to mind. So I said, "You've been publishing in F&SF, which was right, so I scored. She had had half a dozen stories published, mostly in F&SF. I invited her to come over. Her husband was a professor at Tulane and was on some kind of an exchange deal with the British, which was what they were doing in London. We got together several times and started talking about doing a collaboration. She was very much against it. She had had a very bad experience on a collaboration with Willy Ley once. She said that Ley had come up with the idea of collaborating on a big, huge novel of Medieval Germany. After much urging she agreed to it. He was to supply all the arcane lore and she was to do all the work. After she had typed about six inches he came to her house and said something to the effect that she was trying to cash in on his name. She took the manuscript from his hands and threw it into the fireplace. He tried to rake it out, but it burned. That influenced her against collaboration, but I insisted that we really ought to take a whack at it. One day, long before that, I had tried to work out the most elemental title that I could think of. I thought of "earth" and "blood," two very elemental substances. "Earthblood," I said. "That's a very good title." And I filed it away and didn't do anything about it. Later I was sitting at my dinner table in England and this line came into my mind: "The sign scabbled to the dog-yellow

rock wall read: FOR SALE - VIABLE HUMAN EMBRYOS - GENUINE TERRESTRIAL STRAIN." I ran to the phone to call Rosel and tell her that and she said, "Yes? And then what happened?" I said, "Well, then those villainous people get a hold of the embryo." And she said, "Oh, no, they don't! It's this nice old couple." And I said, "Okay. We're collaborating, kid. Let's go." We got together a couple of days later and planned the first chapter. Then we went home and both wrote what we had planned. When we got together again we had written exactly the same story, except that we had each picked different points to describe. They were in no way identical, yet they were both the same. So I took the two versions and wrote a synthesis of them. She was pleased with it, so we plotted out the second chapter and the third and then we flipped a coin to decide who would do what. After that we alternated chapters. We wrote two chapters a week and got together to read each others chapters and bring the whole thing together. We just kept going that way. In the case of my collaboration with Gordie [Gordon R. Dickson], I had written a novel and just wasn't satisfied with it - it just didn't jell. So I put it aside. Later I told Gordie about it and he said that it sounded alright and I said it sounded alright to me, too, but I wasn't pleased with it. So he said for me to send it to him and maybe he could spot what was bothering me. So I sent it to him and he wrote a four page, single spaced letter suggesting things I could do with it. I suggested that we make it a collaboration - that he take it and do all those things to it. He worked it over quite extensively and sent it back to me. I think there were about twenty pages of new material, plus a lot of marking up on the existing pages. So I went over the whole thing again, integrating everything together to create the final job.

GOLDSTEIN: Are you planning any more collaborations?

LAUMER: I have no plans, but if something good should come along I might.

GOLDSTEIN: After you and Rosel Brown had finished writing the chapters for *Earthblood*, did you polish them up or leave them as they were?

LAUMER: I took the whole thing and went over it from beginning to end. I tried to make everything go together perfectly and eliminate any discrepancies. I don't think I missed any. Then I sent it to Rosel for her to read and I still have the letter she sent me. I wish I could quote it to you exactly. She was a very lady-like little lady and she said something to the effect that we had done a very fine job, that it was a credit to both of us, and any son of a bitch that didn't agree...

GOLDSTEIN: Do you have any particular favorites among your own writings?

LAUMER: No. I recently re-read everything I've written - because I had a lot of time on my hands - and frankly I thought it was all magnificent. I usually like the one I'm working on the best, but looking back I can't think of any one favorite.



Cataclysm. Endings and beginnings. A universe in turmoil and powers beyond man's feeble imagination.

Yet another magnastar had gone supernova in an immeasurable explosion followed by a yet greater implosion - worlds had gone mad and been torn from their orbits in the casual manner of nuggets swirled in the pan of a Forty-niner; only there was no man at that end of creation to record the happenings. Even if one had been within range to observe and record, he'd not have survived to tell the tale.

The events spawned their own messenger. A blue cloud hurled itself from the fringes of the upheaval and sped across space. A cloud - if it could be called such. An almond shape, light years across, scintillating, even in the inky, dead blackness of space: white points, like the caps of waves brisked by a taut breeze scudding over the Mediterranean south of Athens on an April morning.

A blue-white cloud that coursed implacably at the speed of light.

Stan Rover swore silently to himself as the recycling dystil went on the blink again. The water tasted distinctly salty and sour and he preferred not to think about it. He wished that one of those know-it-all systems-scientists back at Kennedy could be here in the one man spacer instead of him; that would get them to iron out the kinks in a hurry.

This had been a long haul and a fellow tended to get lonely. The optasonic music sys-

tem and the cassette solid tri-di video phono microphonic library were okay up to a point. So were the chess and ultra-bridge games he played against the ship's computer: a guy could even forget that the computer was programmed to lose once in a while. Yet he still found time hanging increasingly heavy. He needlessly rechecked systems he'd checked just hours before; that weren't due for a recheck for at least a Terraday or two.

Even Cynthia had kidded him about his name this time, just as his space buddies had been doing for years, but not too kindly. Bud must have told her. And she had added that this trip had better be his last one; with a baby on the way it was time that he settled down on Terra. Stan calculated that this trip would fetch him enough to buy a homestead and start a little business on the side and God couldn't she see that he loved her so and did so much want them to be together? Men had a way of aging quickly in the solo spacers and if he kept at it he'd soon not be of much use to anybody. They said the same thing had happened to the jet jockeys back in the Twentieth. Most of those fighter pilots had gone grey before their time.

At any rate, this was his last assignment before swinging home. He had come out of light-warp a few parsecs back and had only to take a geologic subsurface survey of Cliny IV - a medium sized asteroid just Solward of Antares. The computer could handle the job by itself and Stan often wondered if he was really necessary to the ship. The scientists still insisted on having a man aboard each spacer, "in case something should happen," except that Stan had never

heard of anything happening that really warranted a man's presence. Even as he thought all this the computer had placed the ship in a parking orbit and started the exo-geigers and mas-nectors - at the end of one orbit the survey strip was microfilmed and stored by the memory banks. And then homeward to Terra and Cynthia.

Stan rechecked the instruments as the ship prepared to go into light-warp. He would cover the last light-year to Terra in a few hours. He was always fascinated by the warp approach, as the ship built up to the speed of light. He often wondered what would happen if they came out of warp in the middle of a planet. Fortunately, with the computer and the vast emptiness of space, the statistical chances of such an occurrence were literally nil.

Stan looked back and in the very act of turning saw it approach and reach the ship - then he was immersed in it. He'd seldom seen anything as beautiful as the iridescent blue cloud that now enveloped the spacer. Its white highlights danced off the hull and the glaspex visidome. There was an indefinable aura of peace and tranquility about it and for long moments Stan let himself revel in it. He assumed that this was yet another unknown phenomena of deep space that would take man years to study, index and chart.

Suddenly he became aware that the whole ship was humming softly to itself. It was no longer accelerating and, at this rate, would not make it to warp. The mass meters were winding down insanely and the ship was consuming fuel at an impossible rate. The pound mass of the fuel had been enough to last for twenty years - only the life support systems dictated the length of a spacer's voyage. The entire ship began to grow hazy, its outlines blurry. Stan began to panic. This can't be happening on my last voyage and damn it I've got to get back to Cynthia....

Stan just made it to the radex communicator console and started transmitting on the emergency band.

"Mayday! Mayday! This is spacer XT - my ship is breaking up! Dissolving! I'm two lights out from Antares and...."

...but by now the communicator itself was just so much fine dust....

...as was the rest of the ship....
...and what was left of Stan became just another satellite on its own eternal paraboloid orbit - a modern Ophelia attended by a cloud of dust.

* * *

Winston arrived early for the meeting, knowing that Knight would be in the board room alone, planning his conduct of tonight's discussion. The door squeaked as he entered, wringing his hands. Knight regarded him with some irritation.

"What is it, Winston? You know I don't like to be disturbed before a meeting."

"I just had a call from the hospital, sir. It's Alice. She's sinking fast."

"And you want to go to the hospital," interrupted Knight, "instead of the meeting. Again. Is that it?"

"Yes, Mr. Knight."

"Damn it, man. Whenever I need you, you have to take off. Your rushing there won't make any difference, you know, with the oxygen tent, the heart lung machine and all and with her barely conscious. Why don't you get it into your head that your wife's days are numbered?"

"But I've only asked off twice before. You know that, sir." Winston was trembling now, his grey eyes deeply hurt and pained.
"Twice. Show me the times. What's the difference, Winston? I'm not running a charitable organization. We're onto something really big and work is work, man. The meeting is in fifteen minutes and you'll be there or else. I assume that you need this job to pay your precious

wife's medical bills. Is that right?" He looked up.

Winston's shoulders slumped and he looked very tired, indeed. "Yes, Mr. Knight."

"Then that's final, Winston. Now get out and leave me alone. I want to think. Oh, Winston? I suggest that you let her pop off and find yourself another woman."

Winston looked at Knight, long and steadily. Then he sighed softly and shuffled out of the room.

There was total silence, later, when Knight addressed the meeting.

"I want you to sell and corner the entire plastics market, Ryan. Start a run on the exchange. We'll begin by selling our own stock to depress the market, then the other plastics companies will have to follow. Only we'll be quietly buying our own stock back under a different name. We'll also pick up most of the competition in the process. Plastix Corporation will make the biggest killing of all times!"

The others in the room kept staring at Knight even after he had finished speaking. He'd only recently begun greying, but he still kept fit through regular exercise. Shaggy brows jutting over steely blue eyes that bored right through a person's aggressive square jaw that was usually thrust forward, a short haircut and the air of an army general - hardly the type one would expect to be a legend in his own lifetime. A series of deals that smacked of financial wizardry had made him one of the richest and most powerful men on Earth. Rumor had it that he would be World Co-ordinator one day. "Mr. Plastix" looked out the window at the silver blue ocean rolling in at sundown. Pacific Palisades had a commanding view and Knight owned most of the hillside - and most of Los Angeles, for that matter. It was typical of his dealings. Years ago, when the pollution problem had had scientists lick and L.A. was one large smog bowl ready for evacuation, prices had slumped and Knight had bought real estate extensively. What the world didn't know was that he had already privately financed the development of the electro nuleix car. The "enicar," as it was called, created no pollution and even absorbed carbon monoxide - and now enicars were used around the world.

Far below him the first lights were twinkling on Sunset Boulevard. Tonight he could see way down beyond Marina del Rey. He remembered that the kids had been wanting to go to Disneyland for months now, but he just didn't have the time. He turned his thoughts back to the meeting.

"Got it, Ryan?"

"Yes, Mr. Knight."

"And if any one of you fellows say a word of this to anyone, I'll personally materialize on a bitch. His language was still flavored with epithets from the docks where he had begun his meteoric rise to riches. "Damn good thing our trader was the only one to pick up that distress signal from the dissolving spacer. I reckon it'll be seven months before that blue cloud hits Terra and when it does we'll be ready for it. Everyone will be coming to us. They'll have no other choice and we'll be dictating the terms." Knight silently reminded himself that the terms would include his being appointed World Co-ordinator for life. "Alright, Prof. Why don't you go into your spiel for the benefit of the others - so they'll know how important it is."

"Well, we're still working on it, Mr. Knight, but as near as we can tell it bears out Seversky's Theory of Atomic Resonance. It seems that the blue cloud - or whatever it is - has a natural vibration frequency in the ferric-iron band. It sets up resonance in any material containing iron. This causes the material to break up into disparate iron atoms - the dissolving effect Stan Rover was referring to just before his ship turned into so much space dust around him. The very metal of his ship changed into

dust, a wierd sort of metamorphosis - or shall I say, "metal-morphosis?" As you know, every atom has its own distinctive vibration frequency. Even if we drop the temperature, the frequency will not change, not unless we drop it to absolute zero. We just can't keep all the iron in the world at that temperature. It just can't be done. Dr. Meredith paused to wipe his spectacles. He pushed back his unruly mop of white hair with a slightly vexed flick of his pipe. No one knew why he carried the pipe around - he never lit it. "Mr. Knight? We calculate that it'll get to Terra in just over six months - around Christmas. We've already had several reports of ships and space stations vanishing mysteriously. We would seem to confirm our data. But we in Plastix are the only ones who know what it means."

"So that's about it," said Knight. "One whopping Christmas present for us all. Can you imagine what's going to happen when all the iron in the world just goes 'puff'?" He paused for effect. "Despite our nucleonics, space travel, enicars and the lot we're still in the iron age. Iron is at the root of most of our transportation, communications, buildings - the whole works. It'll all just dissolve into so much dust. Bridges will collapse, skyscrapers will fall, airplanes will crash - a Martian invasion will look like a picnic next to this. When the blue cloud hits there'll be no ships, no enicars, no videophones or teletalk, no elevators, no machines, no factories, no nothing. And that's where we come in. Only plastics will be left unaffected and the world's going to need them in a bad way. We'll have the world in our pocket. As soon as we've cornered the market we'll give those out of goofy there the good news and they'll be lining up at Papa Knight's door with their begging bowls. Ryan, how long will you need?"

"I think three weeks should do it, Mr. Knight. A month at the outside." Ryan hesitated, then added, "But Mr. Knight, with this threat to our entire civilization...don't you think we should give the warning now and throw our resources behind the Co-ordinator's Committee and tackle the problem jointly? Maybe there's a solution."

"When I need your advice, Ryan, I'll ask for it," fumed Knight, the knuckles of his clenched fingers turning white. "Meanwhile I'll thank you to do what you're told."

"Wilbur," he continued, "I want you to work up some method of making plastics conduct electricity. And I want results soon."

Dr. Wilbur Wymot looked up and started to speak, but Knight cut him off. "While you're at it, Wilbur, see if you can magnetize the stuff, too. I know it hasn't been done before, but get to it! What do you think I pay you so damn much for?"

Wymot said nothing.

"Is Winston here? No? I had a few things for him, but they'll keep. I'll brief his replacement personally. James, after the meeting get on to Dr. Amar of Caltech, the nobel prize guy. Give him Winston's job and have him here first thing in the morning. Got it?" Without waiting for a reply he turned to the man on his left.

"Randy, we're going to need greater strength if Plastix is going to replace hysteel cored cable. I hear that Polyplast is working on it. Those fellows are pretty tightlipped but once Ryan has bought them out we'll know what they're on to."

"Right, Mr. Knight," said Randolph, "I'll come up with something."

"General, you'd better step up the guards when we make the announcement. Give them orders

to shoot to kill in case any mobs should go for the plants. The new tresspass act should cover it."

The general - who was actually a retired major - was in charge of security. He made a note to himself in his infuriatingly precise manner.

So that's about it for now. Keep me posted. And only me, you hear? I'll keel haul any man who spills the beans!

* * *

Knight had timed and assessed the reaction to the announcement in his usual inimitable manner. He had already cornered the plastics industry. His conglomerate was flooded with orders they'd not be able to fill for some time yet. Plastix shares had rocketed and he was without a doubt the richest man in the world. There was open talk that he would be the next Co-ordinator, likely to be elected at the New Years session of the Council. A large section of the public even referred to him as the Savior. Knight, in his self-effacing public way, protested that he had done nothing to deserve the honor - which, of course, only added to his public image.

Researchers throughout the world confirmed what Knight's scientists had told him much earlier - that there was no solution and that come Christmas eve all the iron in the world would turn to dust. The blue cloud announced its approach as great numbers of automatic space stations and satellites winked out one by one. Their crews had long ago been evacuated and no man dared venture into the reaches of space, for the blue cloud had expanded until it occupied almost the entire space between the nearby stars.

* * *

And Christmas came. And went. And the world was changed.

* * *

It was unusually warm for April. Alice thought that it was pleasant out here in the sun, almost dozing, with the blue Pacific lapping teasingly at her feet. She was still very weak, but the doctors assured her she'd be almost normal in time. She smiled as Winston bent down to tuck the beach rug about her knees and as he did so she ran her fingers through his thinning hair. He looked down into her eyes. They both smiled, sharing an unspoken thought. Then Alice leaned back, stretched and looked up into an azure sky that vied for blueness with the sea.

"Win, you mean that not one scientist in the world had taken it into account?"

"No, darling, why should they? There are none in space. Or on the moon."

"To think that it was our own atmosphere that made the difference..."

"What's so odd about that? It's shielded us from hard radiation and meteor showers for millions of years."

"But even Knight's people didn't think of it."

Winston tucked in a loose corner of the rug. "Nope. They never imagined that our atmosphere would alter the frequency of the cloud."

Alice hummed happily. "Just a band shift or something, right, Win? And it didn't affect iron any more."

"No. It only went for the polymer hydrocarbon chains." Winston looked wistfully out to sea. "I just wish I'd been there, Alice, to see Knight's face when all his precious 'plastix' fell into dust!"

THE END

It's been a long time now
since that terrible barrage
of bombs and missiles
rained down on earth leaving
it gutted and pock-marked
like some vast battlefield.

Once proud civilizations
now lie dead with their
creator/destructors; the
wise, intelligent Homo
Sapiens nothing more than —

MAN the ANIMAL...



Row Campbell 202

...last species to face extinction.



he who was born with an ability to reason and
the knowledge to mold his own
future...



has brought nothing but complete
destruction to planet earth.



Visions of a perfect society expired with the
last war in man's history, and the human race
comes closer to exterminating itself...



... with every meal.

The End

WARP



THE WORLDS FIRST
SCIENCE
FICTION EPIC
ADVENTURE
PLAY IN
SERIAL FORM

ARTICLE
BY
DOUG
FRATZ

It is indeed seldom that good sf can be found presented in the dramatic arts media. No really good reason exists for this lack, but exist it does. Thus, it was with astonished jubilation that I found the Georgetown Theatre Company's production of the science fiction play "Warp" to be one of the most spectacular and enjoyable sf presentations I've seen.

Warp was originally written as a collaboration between Bury St. Edmund and Stuart Gordon. St. Edmund, a playwright, developed the script from Gordon's outline. The original final version of "Warp" was written in conjunction with the Organic Theatre Company actors, in Chicago, a company of which Stuart Gordon was the director. It played for one year at the Body Politic Theatre in Chicago.

The group then made a deal with a New York producer to take the show to New York City, and it opened there February 14, this year. After only one week, however, the New York version closed, mainly because of lack of advance sales, and

unfavorable union negotiations.

Phillip Baloun, President of the Georgetown Theatre Company, after seeing the New York version of "Warp," negotiated with the owners of the play to do it in Washington. They started production in May, and opened in June, continuing through August, at the Trinity Theatre in Georgetown. They have since moved production to the Washington Theatre Club, where they are still running.

"Warp" is a mad tongue-in-cheek extravaganza of comic book science fiction done in three separate episodes. It compounds, with incredible genius, the elements of parody, satire, adventure, and drama, all packaged with an array of special effects surpassing anything of its type ever before set on stage.

The plot seems typical in outline. David Carson is an average person who finds that he is, actually Lord Cumulus in the Fifth Dimension, the only person powerful enough to save the universe. The grandeur and complexity of his situation continue to build throughout the play.



Each triumph ends up showing awesome, unsuspected meaning behind what has gone before. The third episode ends revealing a picture of what has happened so touching that if not for the frequent comedy release, the play would have ended without a dry eye in the house.

The actors of the Georgetown Theatre Company do a simply marvelous job. Byron Utley creates a beautifully alien image of the arrogantly evil Xander, of the Sixth Dimension. Never before have I seen a creature so alien walking and talking before my very eyes.

Dan Szelag also proves himself to be an outstanding actor with his portrayal of Lugul-banda, the wise and ancient keeper of knowledge, whose bad memory and hokey wisdom makes him both immensely comical and unbombastically grandiose.

Pinkney Mikell, in playing Lord Cumulus, proves himself both an excellent actor and a talented acrobat. Lord Cumulus fights with mind bolts, and one can almost see the energy thrust

across the stage, sending Lord Cumulus flying head-over heels. Mary Korsch, as Sargon, female warrior and trainer of Lord Cumulus, is equally agile, in both her acrobatics and acting. She brings Sargon to life with alarming skill.

The superbly arranged special effects continually keep the play at its level of momentous grandeur. All lighting and music is designed and written by Stephen Cramer. Particularly impressive is a reverse time sequence in Episode 1, done with a strobe light. "Warp" easily outdoes, on stage, the special effects on most of movies.

No one who has ever enjoyed science fiction can afford to refuse this seldom-made offer: a really good science fiction play.

("Warp" is playing at the Washington Theatre Club, 23rd & L Streets NW. For information and reservations, call 466-8860.)



Photography by Rick Eskite

consented to be my lover so I took her painfully and still hear her screech on my back." He gibbered to some private audience and peculiarly I was not saddened to hear him so. I even felt that if I knew only a fraction of his fractured blather I could be freed from my present ironclad integrities.

"I don't believe so," said Serena, cocking her head to admire Thargic's earlobe.

"No, I don't recall anyone else. Just us four. Nothing's changed." But as I spoke I doubted my words. Perhaps Thargic meant me. My hair was once brown when I had it. Did he forget so easily? Was there someone with brownhair other than me? Someone who sat with us otherday?

Thargic seemed impatient and dissatisfied as he bellowed, "Awright, awright. Serena and I are going to, ah, inspect some damaged scaffolds and whatnot and we'll meet you back here at eventide for plateloads."

I nodded my head in agreement and as they rose from their seats to depart I detected a faintly visible evanescent shower of redwhite sparkle motes floating and drifting from around their bodies onto the table and floor. Some of it landed upon my right hand with a slightly anesthetizing effect and after a bad moment during which I imagined miniscule larval forms burrowing into my capillaries I shook the tiny grains free.

As soon as Thargic and Serena had left I stamped the table for another gluglug. I tried to think of common ground over which to approach Oscartel, though I'll admit that he didn't seem overly receptive and was presently chewing on his corner of the table.

"Ballastine, barristern, stripstirrup the nobles," he said.

"It is often the case that cautious men lend lengthy, though contemptibly dull, lives, whilst the derringdoers advantage themselves quickly of death's temptations," I quoted from a tape I had memorized as a yung. Oscartel didn't incline to respond and began to stare with fibersplintered mouth agape at some secret apperception. I speculated on the possibility of my obligations to Oscartel and rightly divined that I could do no harm by the fellow if I were to leave him to his intangible companions. Giving up the rope I pounced from my seat and surged outside giving no more care to my direction.

Events intervened as they are wont to do. There was a storm. It raged for several days and destroyed many of the weaker edifices and deposited vast harsh rows of sand in the streets and open livingquarters. The sweepers have yet to collect it all. I never returned to meet Serena and Thargic and they have apparently withdrawn to a privatespace to whittle away at each other. At least I suppose they have. Thargic was far too sensible to go strolling across the Plains.

I have stopped staying in my livingquarter and have found a comfy nook of carpet under one of the dictadesks in the Fivefold Intertown Dispute Arbitration Court to serve as my sleeperspace. The shockbars must have gone bad in the storm cause the raz and roaches and mildcax are back sniffing around. Thus far I have been mindful to shoe the larger more impertinent raz out of the office here at night with a clubludgeon that I aptly improvised from one of the supports in the sandfilled Circle fountain. But I think that this little pushing has made a few of the more testy raz rather petulant and it is possible that they shall marshal their forces one night when I am enamoured of some fatal frail dreammate and gnash me to a smear as I drowse.

Apart from the disappearances, Oscartel and the protechs have vanished along with Thargic and Serena, things have been surmisedly unsurprising. Though I did see that bejeweled woman, Chassia, or whatever her name is, on a rooftop one morning. She was virtually apperiless except

for the clinging twinklies and was heaving words like stones to the sky with her arms upraised. Screaming something or other about "heralds, queens, and admonishers of the pure." Or perhaps she said "monickers of the poor," since my hearing isn't what it once was, but in sooth I assume she was really trying to coax that wretched looking bird back.

The cookinservs have started dishing up asordid icky heaps of rotting algae and I have grown weak avoiding their travesties of sustenance. But the dictadesk still consents to tape my biddingsbye and benedictions and I hope to continue and I hope to continue for as long as plausible. Mostly I miss the yung kinderlings and have elinked at dusk several times to the Yungspace hoping to catch the gentlest ghostly whisper of a child sighing off to sleep. Nonesuch. Only the vicious wind sucking and clinching like a sandtoad's parched tongue at my stale ragstatters. And I dwell foolishly and overlong upon scraps of oldsongs and sayings that rise to puddle on the surface of my rattled thought, oldthings that have no use; "A town with no yung is like a lyre with no strings, no matter how hard you pluck it, only silence it sings."

THE END



Many of the livingblocks, workshops, chopouts, offices, and otherspaces were abandoned blank and empty. The dazzling daycolors which had once pulsed and overwhelmed on the fronts and walls of these spaces had dimmed considerably if not gone completely out on most. I supposed that when the dults and yungs had gone from a livingblock onto the street, they hadn't bothered to set their dials on longterm. And they must have walked out of Gumboli since the underides haven't worked in ever so long. But all the other towns are so far away and there are many deadlies thriving at night on the Plains.

Soon and weathering still, I heard loud laughter tossed out from a livingblock on the street. I crossed over and flinched a pricking of precaution as I approached where the sound had come from. The windscape was open, no shielding or frosting. I peered into the living-square and could easily distinguish the shattered squawkboxes, and chaotic disarrangement. Biltzed fabrics, crumbling ornamented basins, ruined harpisspoons, all topeyturried. In one corner of the space on a gargoyle and phoenixid oleseat sat a woman. I thought I had seen her before in socialspaces and shopouts along the Circle. It seems her name was something like Chassis or Shasstri.

Her head was bowed and her hair hung in dark and raggedknots across her face. A worn grayspun robe loosely covered her skin. But about her head, neck, wrists, fingers, breasts, waist, thighs, and ankles were a multitude of brilliant shining bracelets, bangles, necklaces, allied diadems, hoops, rings, and chains. Dismunds, jade, opals, gold, turquoise, rhinestones, and the precious rest clustered and teeming like living creatures aswarm her body. All aglitter twinkling in the watery light like a host of glistening drones and prismatic worker ants trying frantically to revive a dead queen. In addition, roosting upon her left shoulder was a rather unpleasant looking blackbodied bird with a prominent red warty dewlap dangling. His limp green eyes looking into my stomach. I think he even had a dismound crusted wristwatch strapped around his neck. After a mere second I urged myself best backwards knowing it was wise not to disturb this pair.

I didn't lingual long on the streets but scuttled straight on to the Circle, bemoaning the failure of the circlesusan to operate. The fountain in the center was dry and yet I couldn't remember how long it had been that way. I squished through the membrane entrance of the Delayed Response socialspace and saw Thargic, Ocartel, and Serena sitting at one of the reartables. They had gotten there heads before me and had each ordered at least one drink. I slipped into the seat beside Ocartel and paunched for a double gluglug. The table winced and produced a cupful from its interior.

"Goot mornin Pontifit," said Thargic, greeting me with a handswave. "Have you arrived at any conclusions concerning the reason for Gumboli's disgraceful deterioration?"

"No," I replied, "my concluding faculties have been oddly occluded with fear recently and I haven't had time to ponder rations."

"Well, despite the fact that my memory retentions are daily leaking away like water from a cracked dam, I seem to recall something about strongly centralized societal communication systems disintegrating as the result of interference or blockage from an external source. I tend to suspect that the reason that our fones, squawkboxes, soddies, and underides don't work anymore is because the hierarchical relay network that heretofore has connected Gumboli and other towns to central information disseminators has been disjuncted, or bushwacked, so to speak, at a level above that of our local towns." Thargic spoke with more calm assertive assurance than I could ever hope to muster and I balked eloquently at the complexity of his talktrain. Before whatever happened happened, Thargic had been a legal tender in the Fivfold Intertown Dispute Arbitration Court and had won some rather notorious cases pertaining to boundaries in resource-rights cases. Of course, there were a few rumors that he had forged survey maps but no one in Gumboli complained.

"Yessyes," said Serena, "hierarchical dysfunctionings. We collapse until we reach a place of rigidity, then we stay the vassals, I've even wondered if we might not dismantle the sweepers. They make the streets look so much more empty in the mornings." She looked frazzled and disenchanted and seemed to keep glancing at Thargic for a rotten tooth. A tear in the weave of her yellow shopout clerk suit suggested a mishap of some sort. But for all her wearied languor Ocartel looked much worse.

Ocartel spoke brokenly and without emotion, "Ourglass freeewhees...which whelp will find his dominion...mine are hapless aristocrats...couldn't pull out a rotten tooth. He refused to look at any of us and chose instead to ogle vacantly the threeeased monotonous wall patterns that vaguely resembled phenological sculpture. I immediately discarded the possibility that I had harbored of Ocartel having put the womanquin in my sleeperswell. His absent mood excludit it.

"I saw three male protechs at the end of my block this mornin' and said, 'I offered you, if you really want the sewwing halted you could probably consult one of them and they would do it for you.' I didn't think she would bother but it was polite to let her know that there were still a few technicians in town.

"? 'Naw," she said, "I don't trust any of those motherhuggers. Last night on my way home one of them tried to pull me into some filthied livingsquare and I had to clout the scullion wh my satchel to get him to let go of my. And then the sickie kept yelling that he knew where 'the reverend choplock' was while I was scampering away. Even if things are falling apart you'd think dults would retain a little decorum. The corners of Serena's mouth had noticeably stiffened when she said 'clout' and I had a splitsecond illumination of her standing alone in her livingspace weeping.

Somehow I remembered the day I had walked to town's edge and sat in the shade of an underide stop staring at the scalding dust and sand achin like a tomb in front of my. Looking out across the Plains that creep for miles to the feet of the mountains. The Plains sparsely spotted and spelled with stiffbrack trees, glum pools of bitter water, and whered patches of sandgrass or dryweed.

That was the day I saw the Grandedlegant's son, Baltor, kill a protech man with a rock. They were standing in the wilted shade of a stiffbrack some fifty years past town's edge and arguing loudly. They didn't see me sitting beside the underide. Suddenly the protech leaped on Baltor and vised his pale hands on Baltor's throat. They rolled and kicked and dust blossomed like vapor from their thrashings. Then I saw Baltor clutch a doublefistsized rock and bring it down again and again thudding and smashing into the protech's skull.

Then Baltor was crying and he stumbled and ran through the sands away from Gumboli. I vomited until my stomach cramped and blood streamed from my throat. The next day I went back and looked for the protech's body but it wasn't there and many large strange tracks were all around the stiffbrack. Baltor never came back.

Thargic spoke again, "Ostensively, our predicament isn't inordinately severe for I have observed that our basic energy source, the solarcups, are thoroughly self-regulating and will probably continue storing energy for decades. Our water and algal supplies are likewise self-regulatory and designed to last a long time so we need not suffer in that respect. However, I am seriously perturbed at our rapidly diminishing population and haven't been able to devise a satisfactory explanation for the loss. I haven't even been able to find any corpses and that does perplex me. It seems like just yesterday there were more of us meeting in here. Wasn't there a brownhaired lad who joined us in our talks, Serena?" Ocartel jerked from his slumberslouch and muttered, "No other, no other...sanctuary...emasculated by hysterical shellbreakers...I am not those hateful circuits she was a trapezeus, an artison courting valor and death...she nwer



I never tried being hystorianalytical before. I was always a talker and talkers don't have to think. But now things are different. There aren't anymore yung to talk to. Gumbull is getting kinda lonely. So I'll tell something about the way it's been going here in Gumbull.

I think we never used to hurt one another. But the last few weeks I have seen dults kill one another. It is possible that we did kill before, but it must have been in hidden spaces cause I never saw it. And if it was that way all along then maybe it's best that now it's in the open. It is not good to hide things from ourselves.

Otheday I woke in my privatespace shaking and jaws aching. My sleepfabrics stank inexplicably of animal enzymes. I lay in my sleeperwell recoiling at some barely skimmed feardream. There was a womanquin in my sleeperwell with me. One of those plastiflesh showercliffs that they use to drape the latest in fashion shopouts. Synthetic Pelonwig. Wretches frozenpaint eyes staring at my ceiling. Naked as a seam.

I couldn't remember where the thing had come from. Did I lift it from a viewer-window and lug it to my privatespace the night before as a senseless climax to an evening of senseless ambling? Did the prankish Oscartel shuttle it in here? Had it been here for days and I just hadn't noticed? I didn't know. I decided to put it in one of my storespaces but when I stood up holding it by the wrist and pulling it to me, the hand came off with an audible crack and a shissing yellowish powdery gas smelling for all the Boll like orchidees issued from the wristbreak. I was a little taken aback but took it in agroin acceptance of the unusual as when the wildcat spent a night howling in the streets until the next morning when one of the protechs repaired the shockbars.

After a mite the gas drifted whitely away and I hoisted the womanquin (I named her Etta, after the Grandelegant's daughter) into one of my furnichairs. I figuredelght into the adjoining room, sat at the cookinserv and plunked foodtones on the tablestringers. After I inusted a plateload of steaming slushncrip and guzzed a cup or two of gluglug I went back into the livingpace and asked Etta why some of the servomechs, like the squawkscreen, fone, soddio, and underide to other towns, didn't work while others, like the cookinserv, the sleepers, the sweepers, and the shockbars to keep the raz and wildcat out, did work. Etta was Jasperatingly noncommittal but I excused her as she was dumbfoundered and meant only to poise. Still, why couldn't the protechs fix the faulty servomechs?

I defogged the windescape and looked into the street at the previous night's accumulations. Leaves, paintparchments, shreds of drape or skinsuit, shimmering trails of fluttering tapes. The faintfading blue squareblock directly across from my window, the Fivelfold Intertown Dispute Arbitration Court, appeared to be in satisfactory condition, although one of the plastistaff canopy poles at the entrance was showing signs of slowbend. I assumed that something had leaned against it. To my left several sweepers were working their wheels up the street towards the North Circle.

At the corner to me right, in front of the former Sensorael Palace, two men were standing, one squatting, the two uprights engaged in ver-boiling with one another. All three were wearing the rednorange suits of protechs. Their words were indistinct but evidently spincturedfull of emotivations as they were beginning to shout backforth. I turned away from the windescape with intent to garb myself and heard a warbled shriek and looked back to see the squatter now standing and the othertwo running lumpy sodfoot in the direction of the Circle. The standing squatter stood for a moment looking at a small metalcube perched like a sandbettle in the palm of his hand. He then dropped the beetlecube into the street and quickly crushed it with his foot. Unhesitatingly, he galloped off wheresoever his associates had sped.

After scratching the spot on my skull where hair had once sprouted, frosting the view, and sidling into one of my purple talker's suits, I pushed through the envelope and slid down the tunnel into the street. I felled not bad but something qualmed me up a little. Couldn't finger it. Before on likedays I'd get up and walk to the Yungspace and apend the day sitting and rolling and talking the whatever and the whatsofor with the yunges. The same things most talker's did. But a few whites ago all the yunges left. It's just as well cause I've forgotten all my talklines.

I decided to make it over to the Circle where lately I'd been meeting Thargie and the rest to mumble questions and smooth or inflate the daily irkings. Instead of going directly down my street I chose to do a stanley and wanderjust a few streets over to my right with hopes of arriving at the Circle coming from the east.

Thoughtfully aiming my stride and staying more or least to the middleroad and out of the shadows I markedmarvelled upon the foresight of my forebears in producing such wonderfully wide bullevards.



BOOK REVIEWS

The Listeners by James Gunn (Scribners, 1972, \$6.95)

The name of James E. Gunn rarely comes up in discussions of contemporary science fiction writers. If he is mentioned at all, it is usually as one of the authors of the '50's--dated, forgotten and hopelessly behind the times. He is known as clever, but unfortunately old-fashioned.

Bullfeatherst James Gunn is still very much with us. His output over the past decade has been somewhat reduced, due perhaps to his duties as a member of the University of Kansas English Department. But he is still turning out quality science fiction with professional regularity. When his 1962 novel, The Immortals, became a 1970 TV series, Gunn himself quietly adapted it as a brand new Bantam paperback. His excellent science fantasy novel, The Burning, appeared in 1972 to almost no fanfare whatsoever.

Now, we have The Listeners, a novel that has been appearing piecemeal in the magazines for about five years. The individual segments have been fine; the title chapter was a runner-up for a Nebula in 1969. Unfortunately, they fail to jell into an effective whole. It's too bad, because the material that Gunn is working with is superb.

The novel concerns a "listening project"--a radio observatory in Puerto Rico with its "ear" tuned constantly to the stars, waiting for a message from extraterrestrial broadcasters. The project has gone on for fifty years without success, and political pressure demands that it be shut down. Then, a message comes, and changes the lives of all concerned--not just members of the project, but people around the world.

And isn't that what science fiction is all about: the effects of technology and discovery on people? Gunn's characters, however, are stereotypical and shallow. He sticks over too much, preferring superficiality to in-depth examination, mawkish sentimentality to true emotion. It's a good book, but it could have been a great book, and near misses are always infuriating.

It can be recommended anyway, if only for its message: that if man can learn to communicate between the stars, he can certainly learn to communicate with himself. It's a familiar statement, but an important one. I just hope someone's listening....

—Chris Lampton

Journey Across Three Worlds edited and translated in the USSR (Mir Publishers, 1973, \$2.10)

According to all sources, science fiction is a popular and rapidly-expanding field in the Soviet Union. This collection joins six American and one British edited books on U. S. shelves. Anyone who has not read at least one Russian story is advised to taste-test Isaac Asimov's More Soviet Science Fiction (particularly Ivan Yefremov's "The Heart of the Serpent") before buying this one.

Judging by this latest sampling of Soviet authors, they have come a long way from Yefremov's Marxist version of "First Contact," the Murray Leinster classic. The introduction cites "internationalism," "respect for every ordinary mortal," and "absence of lust for money or property" as noteworthy characteristics--but the stories, fortunately, speak for themselves without need of ideological plugola.

Soviet science fiction is full of John W. Campbell-type technological optimism, swarming with scientists and spacemen (Russian, with rare exceptions) who are never out of reach of a computer or cybernetics manual. In these recent stories they are not addicted to quoting Lenin, nor are they above avocational poetry or painting.



In the title selection by Alexander and Sergei Abramov, a team of scientists use a cybernetic device to send a reporter into the past, future, and parallel worlds to demonstrate the historical inevitability of communism. Capitalists may object, but it's a good premise, handled with finesse.

To Die in Italbar by Roger Zelazny (Doubleday, 1973, \$5.95)

far-swinging masterpiece in three parts, reflecting the traveller's three visits to the world and what he did there and how the world slowly changed from chaos to law. Undoubtedly it was inspired by some of Michael Moorcock's fantasies. There is no real overall plot, as the book is made of little anecdotes, but occasionally parts of the tale will again come into play on the traveller's later trips. Excellent!

—Steven L. Goldstein

The Fabulous Riverboat by Philip Jose Farmer (Berkley Medallion, 1973, 95¢)

This is the second book of Farmer's Riverworld series, wherein all who ever lived and died on Earth were suddenly resurrected on the Riverworld, where none can die but to be again resurrected elsewhere along the river. It is another thrilling addition to this epic adventure sf series.

In this book, Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) attempts to build a great riverboat, with the end goal of sailing up river to discover the reason behind mankind's resurrection on this strange world.

The Riverworld series will undoubtedly be one of the classic science fiction series, possibly even surpassing such greats as Asimov's Foundation Trilogy and Herbert's Dune series. The Riverworld overflows with possibilities. Farmer can choose his characters from all of history, and even create his own characters in history. Much of the fascination of these books stems from Farmer's interesting choice of characters thus far, ranging from Samuel Clemens to a giant pre-human, but intelligent, titanthrop named "Joe Miller". Sooner or later you'll read this book. And you may as well make it sooner.

—Doug Fratz

The Void

Lost in starlight fading fast
the silver ship goes sailing past.
Seeking life in shining seas
other paths that may yet be.

Looking out//empty space
reaching for//not a trace
elusive man//no more haste
here no more//lost the race.

Drone ship flying, mindless cold
Robot men in singular mold
Mechanical tasks, hopeless goals
Ride through space, fall through holes.

Man is gone no use weeping
Metal minds not used to leaping
Bound to tasks with no use keeping
Atomic smoke through the universe seeping

—Steven Lawrence Goldstein

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potent comments

19

Dear Editor:

I must take exception to your editorial in the April 1973 issue of *Thrust*. My complaint is not with your criticism of the TV series *UFO*, which is banal at best, but with your utterly ridiculous reason for hating the show. You say the program's basic assumption is that "All creatures are basically evil, and man's only hope for survival is to be the most evil." The show is too shallow to have a basic assumption like that. Furthermore, it's only the "aliens" in flying saucers that are evil not all creatures. These aliens are out to get us and they even eat humans. What would you have us do, serve up mankind on a silver platter or fight for survival of the species?

What irked me more was your dictatorial pronouncement of what sf should be. You say that sf should teach us to understand the unknown and to use technology for peace, not war. Noble purposes, to be sure. But if anything will kill sf, it is to have it fit some sophomoric mold of what good is. SF is a free form and that means that it has the right to explore evil as well as good. In fact, I would argue that much of the sf written has dealt with death and destruction and powerful evil forces and often the good guys finish last. So why pick on a piddling program like *UFO*? Go to the heart of sf and apply your test. Take

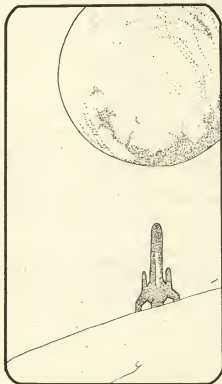
Frank Herbert's widely acclaimed *Dune*, for example, a novel of race war. Is it good to read about the destruction, not merely of a measly alien spaceship, as in *UFO*, but of whole galaxies full of worlds? How does this teach us to understand and love all creatures?

On a different subject, let me congratulate you and your staff for launching *Thrust*. As an editor myself, I know the difficulties of launching a new magazine. I wish you every success next year.

Very truly yours,
Raymond W. Smock
Department of History

(Editor: You completely misunderstood what I had to say in last issue's editorial. I'm not against the characterization or presentation of evil in sf, that would be absurd. I am, though, against the common practice of portraying any alien as evil, for no other reason than that he is alien. Any use of evil in sf does not fit this. Herbert's book is an in-depth study of man's evil ways, but can hardly be interpreted as teaching the reader to be evil.)

Send all letters of comment to Doug Fratz, 202 Cumberland, College Park, Maryland 20742.



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closing comments

Last year, we published two low budget issues of Thrust Science Fiction, with our own money, to form a base for more ambitious issues this year. These issues were well received last year, and we immediately set about plans for this year on a larger scale. I decided, because of our strong financial base, to ask for only \$275, the minimum budget needed for one issue of Thrust Science Fiction in its new format. We filed for the money in our budget, and were refused. I appealed the decision. Again, we got nothing for the magazine.

The Libertarian in me told me that when the government does not respond to the job, do it yourself. And that's just what we've done. Once again, this magazine has been financed by our own private funds.

If the Student Government Association of this university wants to spend its money on vacations in Florida instead of its newspapers and magazines, that's fine with us. But, we still must note that a whole year of Thrust Science Fiction could be distributed on campus free for the same amount of money Katz and crew blew in Florida.

I was glad to see that Thrust Science Fiction was not completely ignored by the other campus media last year. I'm referring to the review of our second issue by Gene Deems in the April 27 issue of Argus/Dimension. Thank you very much, Gene.

That's not to say that the review actually made any sense. It didn't.

It started with his very clever title, "Sci fi mag says--A flaccid 'Thrust'". It sounds like we had a drop in quality, but making no further mention of this, he goes on to like most of the issue.

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Gene then decides that, obviously, Thrust's purpose should be to "indoctrinate those 'Love Story' buffs to good sci fi". In all truth, I can think of no goal further from my mind.

Gene finds the issue's fiction trite. He views Don Smith's as being "nebulous scientific jargon". I recently reread Don's story to find not one technical term. Gene also apparently mistakes Don's numerous puns as grammatical errors. I suggest he read Don's stories a bit closer in the future.

This is not to say that I claim to be publishing the best sf in the country here. That would be absurd. I publish stories that I think are interesting, and competent, if amateur, science fiction. Possibly, in the future, we will be getting professional grade sf. But how many writers are going to want to work for me for nothing when they can work for Fantasy & Science Fiction and get paid for their trouble?

Be realistic, Gene.

-D. Douglas Fratz
Editor-in-Chief
Thrust Science Fiction

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